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## India's Bet on AI: Charting a Different Path

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After the Bletchley Park AI meeting in the UK, the recently concluded Global Partnership on AI (GPAI) summit held on 12-14 December marked another landmark event in the AI summit's busy schedule. The summit culminated with the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration. This AI meet was instrumental in elevating India's stature in the global conversations on AI, simultaneously contributing a different perspective and sharing and connecting India's AI ecosystem with international discussions, linking global with the local. Amidst these developments, it becomes crucial to understand India's AI approach domestically and globally.

**Domestic Drivers: Growth, Governance, and Development**

Under its motto of AI for All, India has focused on AI applications to promote governance, social development, and inclusive growth. India's objective is to improve the lives of citizens, driven by a 'risk-based, user-harm' approach—preferring limited regulations to protect user interests. Integrating AI across diverse sectors—such as agriculture, education, health care, infrastructure, smart cities, and transportation—aims to resolve various issues.<sup>1</sup> Generative AI refers to AI algorithms that are used to create audio, code, text, and images. This is another AI-enabled capability where India wants to build capacity through public-private partnerships. This holds enormous potential for India in the healthcare, language, education, and IT sectors.

India sees AI as a 'Kinetic enabler' in its fast-growing and 'expanding digital economy, growth, and governance.'<sup>2</sup> The domestic approach towards AI is establishing standards with limited regulation to avoid misuse while not restricting its growth. This is directed to harness AI's potential for economic growth, social development, digital inclusion, and national security. A recent report released by IndiaAI—a Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology initiative, projected that India will benefit up to US \$ 400-500 billion by 2025 and US \$967 billion by 2035 from AI adoption.<sup>3</sup> In addition, AI employs around 416,000 professionals, with a growth rate of about 20-25 percent.<sup>4</sup> To realise its full potential, many developments and initiatives have been introduced in the last few years under the National Program of AI (NPAI), which aims to 'foster inclusion, innovation, and adoption for social impact'.<sup>5</sup> The government's initiatives like Future Skills PRIME, AI for Youth, Centers for Excellence (CoEs), and Responsible AI for Social Empowerment (RAISE) are focused on creating an ecosystem that supports up-skilling/re-skilling and providing economic incentives.<sup>6</sup> In this year's Union Budget, India announced three CoEs for AI, and the aim is to increase it to almost 20-30 CoEs in the coming years in partnership with industry and academia.<sup>7</sup> The objective is to build on India's advantages, including its topmost position in skill penetration and third place in high-quality, rich AI publications.<sup>8</sup> On the hardware front, India also plans to extend incentives for manufacturing AI chips under its Semiconductor Mission.<sup>9</sup> In a meeting with Nvidia<sup>10</sup> and Intel CEO<sup>11</sup>, the Indian Prime Minister discussed the potential of AI development, Research, and Innovation in India. Domestically, India has adopted

a broader whole-of-state approach in the AI race, divided into two ecosystems of AI innovation: one led by the government through a whole-of-government approach and another led by Industries, startups, and academia.

### **Reaching out to the Globe: Stepping into the role of Norm Shaper**

Globally, India has aimed to establish a foundational AI framework based on ‘legal and accountability guardrails.’ This framework takes into account AI’s ubiquitous nature. India’s AI approach here is concerned with ethics and the risks involved. The framework builds on a middle-path approach between innovation and risks associated with AI systems, which was visible in practice at the GPAI summit. The New Delhi declaration adopted at GPAI emphasised the need to leverage AI’s positive use, such as for social development and reiteration for inclusivity.<sup>12</sup> In addition, it highlighted India’s concerns about sustainability, inclusion, ethics, and democratic values. Quite conversely, the declaration adopted by Bletchley focused on highlighting AI risks. This shows two opposite perspectives.

In addition, India has used the AI forums to voice the global south's concerns regarding problems arising from emerging technology applications, like lack of inclusivity and accessibility. Other issues include algorithm biases, digital accessibility, misinformation, and disinformation. In its quest to create global consensus, India has prioritised a multi-stakeholder approach, highlighting the importance of working with industries, academia, startups, and epistemic communities across diverse sectors in AI decision and policy-making. It aims to engage with countries on emerging technologies like AI, establishing a New, Emerging, and Strategic Technologies (NEST) Division at MEA.<sup>13</sup> By the end of the year, G7 is expected to form a comprehensive framework on AI, working with GPAI, International Governmental Organisations (IGOs), and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to pursue extensive policy discussions.<sup>14</sup> India is expected to play a critical role at next year's summits.

### **Way forward**

Although there has been remarkable progress in India focusing on pushing AI to the centre stage in policy and practice, many steps remain to be taken. Going forward, the government must collaborate closely with the industry to understand, identify, mitigate, and resolve the threats emerging in AI development driven by its ‘risk-based’ approach. To address this problem, there needs to be a one-point contact that can work with the AI ecosystem to develop dynamic best practices, risk assessment, and accountability framework to promote a secure and safe adoption of AI technology at scale. A multi-stakeholder approach is the need of the hour that works with startups, academia, big tech, and legal think tanks under a whole-of-system approach. Secondly, India must continue being the voice of a balanced perspective on the global stage, becoming a ‘norm shaper’

rather than a 'norm-taker,' protecting its interests and voicing concerns of the global south. It must work closely with developing countries' governments and industries. Holding an AI summit with developing countries would be a welcome step where issues of ethics and development can be discussed. All these steps undertaken at domestic and international levels will likely help India elevate its position at the AI centre stage, emerging as one of the important AI stakeholders in the world, standing alongside the US, China, Japan, the UK, and the EU.

## NOTES:

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